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Interaction between Teachers and Students in the Process of Educational Activities in the Higher Education System

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Abstract

Interaction between teachers and students during the implementation of educational activities in an educational organization of higher education is analyzed in the article. The authors identified the main models of interaction between teachers and students as subject-subject, subject-object and object-subject and conclude that a person (subject), interacting with an object, can define it as a subject if he evaluates it as active, holistic and independent. The authors are of the opinion that teacher-student interaction belongs to the type of subject-subject interaction. The author's questionnaire designed on the basis of theoretical analysis and a series of interviews with students and teachers was used. The questionnaire included 19 statements describing such qualities of teachers as prestige and general competence, emotional competence, social skills, expertise in communication, characteristics of role behavior, and interest towards students. The questionnaire also included statements about students' readiness to follow the role models of teachers in professional behavior. The study involved 2nd and 3rd year students with the major "Social Sciences" at various universities in Moscow (the total sample size was 90 people; 21 male, mean age – 20.1 years). Processing of empirical data include Descriptive Statistics and Exploratory Factor Analysis which were carried out using the statistical package SPSS 24.0. Results show that students rate the professional competence of teachers as high, social status of teachers, their emotional competence, including in interactions with students and role models of professional behavior as above average. At the same time, students associate the formation of their behavioral repertoire with their own experience and do not rate the general social competence of teachers as high. The practical significance of the results lies in identifying problem areas in high education.

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Thus, to increase to increase the perceived overall social competence of the teacher, it is necessary to organize classes in such a way that students have the opportunity to see the teacher in real social situations, but not only in classrooms.

Keywords: education, development, higher education, students, teachers, social interaction.

1. Introduction

It is obvious that the quality of interaction between the parties is of great importance for all participants involved in the educational process. We would like to particularly emphasize the word “interaction” or even “social interaction” (From the editorial..., 2008), and not “provision of educational services”, because in the latter case there is an ambivalent feeling that the teacher is providing some kind of service to the student. In the Russian mentality, the phrase “to provide a service” carries a negative connotation, which consequently affects both the image of individual teachers and the prestige of the profession as a whole. The problem of the declining prestige of the teaching profession has attracted not only public attention, but is also reflected in the relevant amendments to the Federal Law (14.07.2022 No. 295-FL): “provision of state (municipal) services in the field of education” was replaced by the wording “financial support for the implementation of educational programs” and “financial support for the implementation of state or municipal tasks” (Federal Law..., 2022).

The interaction of a person with significant social objects can be subject-subject, subject-object and object-subject (Grachev, 2020). A person (subject), interacting with an object, can define it as a subject if he evaluates it as active, holistic and independent [ibid]. In the context of interaction between teachers and students in the process of educational activities in the higher education system, this classification can be presented as follows: 1) subject-object interaction (teacher is a subject, student is an object), the teacher is an active initiator of interaction, independently determining what knowledge, values, and skills should be developed in the student, while the latter remains only in the passive role; 2) subject-subject (both the student and the teacher are considered as subjects) such interaction presupposes the mutual influence of both partners, the relationship is characterized by recognition of the value of each other's activity, significance and value; 3) object-subject interaction (teacher is object, student is subject), the teacher acts as a passive transmitter of knowledge and skills, the student, on the contrary, is active, holistic and self-determined participant in interaction. Further, we, of course, adhere to the second approach, understanding both the student and the teacher as active subjects of interaction, possessing a system of representations about the role of themselves and partners in the interaction process but concentrating on student's part of interaction.

The interaction between teacher and student, both as a pedagogical and as a socio-psychological phenomenon, can be considered from different theoretical and methodological positions. We consider it promising to turn to the systems approach (Lomov, 1984, Shikhirev, 1999), symbolic interaction theory (Andreeva i dr., 2001; Makateng, 2024) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005; Mauss, 1925). That is, in our opinion, social interaction takes place between the teacher and the student during the learning process, taking into account certain social roles and involving social exchange.

In order to analyze the socio-psychological patterns of interaction between a student and participants in the educational process, it is necessary to briefly turn to the systems approach that describes the social environment. This aspect is important in the context of our work, since a university, as a social institution, should be considered as a social system in the context of which the professional formation of students takes place. R. Ackoff, F. Emery (Ackoff, Emery, 1974) define a system as an integral complex of interconnected elements, each of which is connected with other elements directly or indirectly; the elements create subsets that are also interconnected with each other.

M. Bunge's systems approach describes society as a system of interconnected individuals, while society itself is considered as having systemic properties. At the same time, it is postulated that some of these properties are reducible to individuals, since they are the result of their actions, and some are “determined by the functioning of the system itself” (Shikhirev, 1999). Individuals feel the influence of society through social groups, which assign social roles to the individual that determine his behavior. This methodological aspect is crucial for our work, since it determines the systemic parameters of interactions within the university as a social system. The main provisions of Bunge's system approach are summarized by P.N. Shikhirev as follows: “1) society should be

considered by studying the socially significant characteristics of the individual, as well as the properties and changes of society as a whole; 2) social facts should be explained in terms of individual and group behavior, as well as the interaction of individuals and groups; individual behavior should be explained by the biological, psychological and social characteristics of the person as a member of society; 3) hypotheses about the patterns of functioning and development of society must be substantiated by sociological and historical data containing information about individuals and small groups, because only the latter are available for empirical observation" (Shikhirev, 1999).

As properties of the social system B.F. Lomov highlights its structure, hierarchy, relationships between elements, changes and their patterns, including patterns of development, as well as external relationships (Lomov, 1984). Thus, it is important to emphasize the need for holistic integration of the student into the social system, which includes not only the educational environment, but the social environment in a broad sense – society, public institutions, social groups with which the student interacts. Studying the problem of interaction between a student and participants in the educational influence on him requires studying the concept of "interaction" as a category of psychological science, analyzing the place and role of the subjects of interaction in the educational process. Let's turn to symbolic interaction and role theory.

Symbolic interactionism. According to J. Mead, J. Habermas and H. Blumer, who relied on the views of Georg Simmel, society is built on the exchange of gestures and symbols as elements of communicative interaction, which, in turn, is presented as the essence of society (Andreeva i dr., 2001). The tools of interaction within the framework of the approach under consideration are language, as well as the exchange of symbols and gestures, however, analysis and understanding of their meanings is not enough to understand human behavior as social. The key to such understanding is the knowledge of a kind of code – the internal symbolic meaning of linguistic symbols used by participants in social interaction and understandable to all participants in social interaction. What is important is that these symbols have a predictive function, thanks to them people can understand the expectations of other people and predict the consequences of their actions and behavior.

An important scientific contribution of symbolic interactionism was also the development of the concept of the reflective individual, according to which the reflective individual is a creative and thinking agent, comprehends and rethinks the meaning of his behavior and conducts a constant internal dialogue. The self, starting with Mead, is divided and appears in two forms: "I" and "me." "I" is an acting and thinking subject, creator, initiator. "Me" is a subject reflecting on his "I", reflecting on "himself" and "others" in various contexts - places, situations, time, both real and imaginary. Essentially, it can be described as a mirror through which a person looks at himself and, accordingly, sees himself through the eyes of others. This is the way in which society influences the subject through a kind of passive part of his "I" (Andreeva i dr., 2001).

One of the significant focuses of research interest is the reflective subject, capable of internal dialogue with himself. In our opinion, understanding the interaction of participants in education in the development of youth based on the interactionist concept opens up wide practical opportunities, since it is how a young person sees himself through the eyes of others, how he comprehends himself and his actions, that determines his actions.

Thus, this approach opens up wide opportunities for helping participants in the educational process to young people in forming a repertoire of social roles, which, in turn, shape the personality of a professional and a mature member of society. It is also necessary to take a closer look at the "roles" category. Roles are described by scientists through the category of "role expectation" prescribed to a person by society and social relations. Actually, role acceptance is carried out through the understanding of expectation, enshrined in the conventional norm. Roles are understood as a kind of behavior patterns that impose rights and responsibilities on a person. Fulfilling a role is understood as fulfilling the duties imposed by the role. In the context of the educational process, in order to analyze the interaction between a student and a teacher as a mutual exchange of various kinds of resources, a balance of inputs and outputs, obligations and expectations (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005; Homans, 1958; Mauss, 1925), other theories can be used, for example, the theory of social exchange and the theory of psychological contracts (Ampofo-Ansah i dr., 2019; Blau, 1964; Bordia i dr., 2018; Cao i dr., 2007; From the editorial..., 2008; Koskina, 2004; Liao, 2013; Petersitzke, 2009). Social exchange theory (SET) has had a significant impact on the development of various scientific fields, disciplines and areas of scientific

knowledge (Ahmad i dr., 2023), including social psychology (Homans, 1958), sociology (Blau, 1964) and anthropology (Mauss, 1925). R. Cropanzano and M.S. Mitchell point out that SET is “very flexible and can describe almost any outcome of economic and social exchanges and transactions” (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005). Researchers of psychological contracts usually refer to social exchange theory as the theoretical basis of the psychological contract (Koskina, 2004, Petersitzke, 2009). The student psychological contract is “individual or group subjective understandings of the reciprocal exchanges between students, their teachers and their learning institution. It is made up of promissory (transactional) and non-promissory (relational and ideological) expectations that are not written in any formal agreement; yet, they may operate powerfully as determinants of attitude and behaviour, and potentially attrition and performance” (Koskina, 2004).

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Thus, we consider the student as a reflective subject who is in the process of filling his professional role with content and has certain expectations from the teacher. The repertoire of a student's social role is determined by the system of his interactions in the context of person-society and person-social institution. The research emphasis on the importance of forming a repertoire of professional social roles among students determines the concept of the empirical part of the study, focused on studying students' representations about teachers as a social professional group with which students directly interact. The construction, in the process of social interaction, of representations about teachers as representatives of a professional group (social objects), forms, among other things, the role-playing professional repertoire of students. In the empirical part, students' representations are examined, including their the cognitive, emotional-evaluative and pre-behavioral components.

2. Materials and methods

To achieve the stated objective of the study, a questionnaire was developed based on existing research in this area (Ampofo-Ansah i dr., 2019; Arnup i dr., 2024; Bordia i dr., 2018; Bordia i dr., 2010; Itzkovich, 2021; Tomlinson i dr., 2023), as well as interviews conducted by the authors with students and teachers at the pilot stage of the project. Of the total number of 19 statements that required a degree of agreement from 1 to 5, the majority in their content touched upon the competence of individual teachers (emotional and general social), their skills (communicative, social), as well as the characteristics of role behavior and more general issues of the prestige of the profession as a whole. The questionnaire also included statements about students' readiness to follow the role models of teachers in professional behavior. Psychometric testing confirmed a high level of consistency among questionnaire items (Cronbach's alpha above 0.8). Additionally, questions were asked to identify socio-demographic characteristics, employment, and subjective assessment of academic performance.

Sample. The study involved 2nd and 3rd year students studying the major “Social Sciences” at various universities in Moscow (the total sample size was 90 people):

- 21 male, 69 female;
- Average age – 20.1 years;
- Minimum age – 18 years, maximum – 25 years;
- Married – 5.1 %, unmarried – 94.9 %.

Unlike first-year students, second- and third-year students have already developed an understanding of what to expect from a university teacher (unlike a school teacher) and can answer the questionnaire more consciously (Gagarina, 2008). Fourth-year students were not included in the survey because they were on an internship.

Processing of empirical data was carried out using the statistical package SPSS 24.0. Descriptive statistics and Exploratory Factor Analysis were employed.

3. Results

Analysis of descriptive statistics (Table 1) shows that students rate the professional competence of teachers most highly (5, 13). The social status of teachers (4, 6, 14) and role models of professional behavior (18) are also rated above average.

It is also important to note the positive assessment by students of the emotional competence of teachers, including in interactions with students (3, 11). Students also associate the formation of the cognitive component of their future professional image of the world with interaction with teachers as significant elders (2, 16, 19). At the same time, students associate the formation of their behavioral repertoire with their own experience (15, 17). Students do not rate the general social competence of teachers as high (1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	M*	Med	SD	Min	Max
1. I believe that my teachers are socially competent people.	1,1899	1,0000	,53292	1,00	3,00
2. I perceive interactions with teachers as meaningful to me.	4,0127	4,0000	,96733	1,00	5,00
3. I believe that my teachers have emotional competence, which makes interactions with them appropriate and valuable.	3,9114	4,0000	,94990	1,00	5,00
4. I can rate the social skills of my teachers as follows (from low to high)	4,2658	4,0000	,71088	2,00	5,00
5. When I communicate with teachers, I feel that I am talking with knowledgeable and competent people	4,4051	5,0000	,85514	2,00	5,00
6. My teachers have achieved a lot in their lives, there is a lot to learn from them.	4,0380	4,0000	,86888	2,00	5,00
7. I don't think that studying at a university will sufficiently prepare me for real professional life.	2,9620	3,0000	1,13728	1,00	5,00
8. When I am faced with a difficult social situation, I would like to turn to the teacher for advice.	2,8228	3,0000	1,25840	1,00	5,00
9. I believe that my teachers would be able to successfully handle communication situations in which I have difficulty	3,5190	3,0000	,99821	1,00	5,00
10. In my opinion, a teacher will always be able to find the correct way out of a difficult communicative situation	3,5190	3,0000	,95891	1,00	5,00
11. When interacting with teachers, I feel that they are interested in supporting me.	3,5823	4,0000	1,02040	1,00	5,00
12. I believe that teachers really strive to include topics in academic disciplines that will be useful to me in the future	1,6076	1,0000	,85362	1,00	3,00
13. I trust the opinions of teachers on issues related to my future professional activities	3,7722	4,0000	1,06156	1,00	5,00
14. I believe that my teachers are accomplished and respected people	4,2025	4,0000	,77426	2,00	5,00

	M*	Med	SD	Min	Max
15. I believe that I will learn the correct ways of behavior in my work myself when I go to work and gain professional experience	4,2405	4,0000	,78797	2,00	5,00
16. I believe that in my work I will remember the advice that my teachers gave me	3,8481	4,0000	,96195	1,00	5,00
17. When I encounter difficult professional situations, I imagine how my teachers would behave in this case.	2,3924	2,0000	1,15933	1,00	5,00
18. I believe that my teachers give me correct examples of professional behavior.	3,8734	4,0000	,96565	2,00	5,00
19. I expect that by the end of my studies at the university I will have an understanding of how to act in significant professional situations	3,8861	4,0000	,99984	2,00	5,00

Notes: * M – mean value, SD – Standard deviation, Med – median value

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) performed by the principal components method (PCA) (Watkins, 2018) showed that the questionnaire statements were grouped into 5 factors (components). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), rotated factor matrix^a

Statements	Components				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I believe that my teachers are socially competent people.	-.709	-.138	-.030	-.039	-.073
2. I perceive interactions with teachers as meaningful to me.	.644	-.068	.205	.401	.193
3. I believe that my teachers have emotional competence. which makes interactions with them appropriate and valuable.	.603	.460	.311	.013	.209
4. I can rate the social skills of my teachers as follows (from low to high)	.655	.488	.068	.054	.152
5. When I communicate with teachers. I feel that I am talking with knowledgeable and competent people	.672	.348	.110	-.130	.438
6. My teachers have achieved a lot in their lives. there is a lot to learn from them.	.394	.441	.489	.144	.227
7. I don't think that studying at a university will sufficiently prepare me for real professional life.	-.268	-.100	-.664	-.216	.036
8. When I am faced with a difficult social situation. I would like to turn to the teacher for advice.	.129	.245	.008	.831	.058

Statements	Components				
	1	2	3	4	5
9. I believe that my teachers would be able to successfully handle communication situations in which I have difficulty	-.022	.828	.097	.133	.198
10. In my opinion, a teacher will always be able to find the correct way out of a difficult communicative situation	.327	.727	.109	.273	.052
11. When interacting with teachers, I feel that they are interested in supporting me.	.370	.502	.110	.424	-.134
12. I believe that teachers really strive to include topics in academic disciplines that will be useful to me in the future	-.189	-.067	-.762	.030	-.307
13. I trust the opinions of teachers on issues related to my future professional activities	.691	.053	.201	.328	-.058
14. I believe that my teachers are accomplished and respected people	.540	.430	.384	.115	.109
15. I believe that I will learn the correct ways of behavior in my work myself when I go to work and gain professional experience	.434	-.207	-.588	-.080	.293
16. I believe that in my work I will remember the advice that my teachers gave me	.343	-.010	.437	.490	.379
17. When I encounter difficult professional situations, I imagine how my teachers would behave in this case.	-.036	.269	.232	.649	.410
18. I believe that my teachers give me correct examples of professional behavior.	.373	.373	.135	.187	.466
19. I expect that by the end of my studies at the university I will have an understanding of how to act in significant professional situations	.103	.114	.049	.157	.789

Extraction Method: Principal Component Method. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 16 iterations.

We accept 5-factor structure because all factors appeared theoretically meaningful; for interpretation we choose only statements with loading over 0.6.

The first factor «the competence of teachers» includes 6 statements describing professional, social and emotional competence and the significance of interactions with teachers for students (Table 2) and these parameters are high (Table 1).

The second factor «the communication skills of teachers» includes 2 statements (Table 2) which do not have high scores in student assessments (Table 1);

The third factor «representations about the efforts of teachers to work on the content of academic disciplines» includes 2 statements (Table 2) emphasizing the usefulness of the material for preparing for future professional life and do not have high scores in student assessments (Table 1);

The fourth factor «a cognitive-behavioral block that accumulates teachers' perception as a point of reference in making evaluations and decisions» includes 2 statements (Table 2) and the last factor «students' pre-behavioral readiness to follow their model» consist only 1 statement (Table 1).

In [Table 3](#) total variance explained is presented.

Table 3. Total variance explained

Component	Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% variance	Cumulative %	Total	% variance	Cumulative %
1	7.460	39.263	39.263	3.912	20.591	20.591
2	1.690	8.896	48.159	2.785	14.656	35.247
3	1.299	6.837	54.996	2.250	11.844	47.091
4	1.237	6.511	61.507	2.062	10.850	57.941
5	1.085	5.712	67.219	1.763	9.278	67.219

4. Discussion

According to results, there is ambivalence in students' perception of teachers: on the one hand, students note high professional, emotional and role competence and on the other hand, general social competence and reference in the behavioral aspect are rated lower. Factor analysis showed that students' perceptions of teachers are grouped into 5 blocks: Competence, Communication skills, Representations about the future, Teacher as a point of reference in making evaluations and decisions, Expectation of professional and behavioral competence. The structure we obtained is partially consistent with the results of other studies. Y. Itzkovich identified for aspects of students' expectations in the context of the psychological contract: (1) fair treatment and high moral standards in evaluation of students performance, (2) quality of teaching and use of various teaching methods, encourage in-depth thinking, and be interesting, (3) knowledge in the scientific field and the currency of learned material, and (4) deviant expectations shifting the responsibility for the learning and achievements from the students to their faculty ([Itzkovich, 2021](#)).

In systematic review sought to understand student expectations of teaching and learning when starting university, four groups were identified: additional study, self-managing learning, teaching and learning activities, and accessibility of a teacher ([Tomlinson i dr., 2023](#)). International students expect best possible educational, social and psychological experience ([Bordia i dr., 2018](#)).

In our study, students have high expectations of teachers' the competence of in professional, social and emotional spheres and rate the interactions with teachers as significant. While the requirements for professional qualifications and a high level of knowledge are confirmed in studies by various authors ([Itzkovich, 2021](#); [Tomlinson i dr., 2023](#)), it is also important that students expect emotional involvement from teachers in the teaching process ([Gretzky, Lerner, 2021](#)).

Students also have expectations about one's own professional and behavioral competence by the end of university studies. This result suggests that students potentially expect that the university, as a social and professional institution, will prepare them for their future professional life. This circumstance creates a stable basis for improving teaching practices at the university, including strengthening those aspects of interactions between teachers and students that are aimed at developing relevant role models among students. It is especially important for international students that teachers adhere high standards of education connected with the future career, because they sacrifice work and career opportunities in their home countries in order to study in the host country ([Bordia i dr., 2018](#)).

But in our study, representations about the efforts of teachers to work on the content of academic disciplines, which emphasize the usefulness of the material for preparing for real professional life have average significance. This may be due to the fact that students have vague ideas about their future professional activities and have not yet made their final decision about employment. The communication skills of teachers also do not have high scores in student assessments. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the formation of the behavioral repertoire of a professional role at this stage (completion of the second year of bachelor's degree and third year) in the minds of students occurs regardless of interactions with teachers. Despite the

high social status of teachers in the perception of students, students rate the social competencies of teachers as low. This may be due to a generational gap and to the lack of competence of teachers in the digital environment, including communication. In any case students associate the formation of their own repertoire of professional roles with their own experience. Another possible explanation may be related to the extent to which students themselves are willing to contribute to the development of their own competencies. «Students' realistic aspirations about their educational attainment (expectations) are predictive of their efforts, actions, and future outcomes» (Arnup i dr., 2024). It has been shown that the more effort students put into research projects, the higher their expectations of their supervisors will be (Bordia i dr., 2010, Homans, 1958). However, the intensity of effort put in by students may vary depending on their personality (Bordia i dr., 2010). It is also shown that the expectations of students and teachers are not something fixed and rigid. Students' representations about the responsibilities of teachers can undergo significant changes as they study, gaining knowledge about the functioning of the university, its rules, and the distribution of roles and areas of responsibility among different participants in the educational process. As a result, initially vague and undefined, these representations increasingly begin to reflect the real state of affairs in the interaction between teacher and student (Ackoff, Emery, 1974).

The limitation of the study is the problem of heterogeneity of the sample, the number of female respondents is three times higher than that of male respondents. This limitation can be overcome in future studies.

5. Conclusion

Summarizing the results obtained, we can draw the following conclusions.

Firstly, the relationship between participants in the educational process can be considered from the perspective of a systems approach, symbolic interactionism and social exchange theory. During social interaction, students form representations about the teacher as a representative of a professional social group, possessing expertise, correct role models and emotional competence. This result is of deep significance for the teaching practice of universities, since it indicates that there is no significant gap between the expectations of students and representations about teachers as representatives of a professional group. The identified pattern shows a confident basis formed by the middle of their studies at the university for the further formation of correct professional role models in students due to the emotional and cognitive components of social cognition in the field under study.

Secondly, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of pedagogical influence is based on the personality and social status of the initiator, as well as the use of special techniques to increase involvement. Deep integration of the teacher into the social environment, recognition by society of his high status, the use of correct role models of behavior that are highly valued by society, as well as demonstration of deep conviction in his words and actions will ensure the effectiveness of interaction in the educational process.

Third, to increase the perceived overall social competence of the teacher, it is necessary to organize classes in such a way that students have the opportunity to see the teacher outside the classroom. A teacher can act in different roles and implement different functions. The interaction between a teacher and a student can be not only learning-oriented, but also personality-oriented and involve going beyond their social responsibilities (roles of teacher and student, as well as the time frame of work and study), willingness to do more, immersion in the problem and showing sincere interest. Universities should encourage not only formal forms of interaction, but also informal ones, for example, attending social events, conducting excursions, or simply studying outside the classroom. If education is set as a task, then this is not only an assessment of academic performance, but also about behavior in a broad social context (in transport, in the yard, in a cinema, in a museum, and just on the street). For example, how teacher/student speaks, greets, interacts, solve problems and disagreements. This can be fully seen (and in some cases, corrected, suggested, set an example) only in "natural conditions".

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